

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

SSCI

3 May 1988

MEMORANDUM FOR: John Despres

SUBJECT: Soviet Preparations for the Party Conference

John

The attached memorandum addresses Senator Bradley's interest in Gorbachev's ability to manage the upcoming Party Congress. For the Senator's convenience we have prepared an unclassified document. He should be made aware, however, that [redacted] Gorbachev and his allies have already selected the delegates and that the regional party plenums will simply go through the motions of electing them. This information [redacted] naturally follows from the discussion on page two and its proper place is indicated with an asterisk. [redacted]

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Douglas J. MacEachin
Director of Soviet Analysis

Attachment:
As stated

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

SOVIET PREPARATIONS FOR THE 19TH ALL-UNION PARTY CONFERENCE

General Secretary Gorbachev has made significant progress in generating public discussion of radical political reforms to be considered at the All-Union Party Conference in June. But the degree of his success in controlling preparations for the conference is still unclear. Apparent delays in defining the powers of the Conference and selecting delegates probably reflect intense political infighting in the party.

I. The Agenda

In recent weeks, there have been signs that Gorbachev's drive to restructure the political system is gathering momentum. The press has begun to publish provocative reform proposals touching on sensitive political issues, including:

- o electing party leaders by secret ballot with a choice of candidates.
- o limiting terms of office to maximum of 10-15 years.
- o changing the occupational composition of the Central Committee to reduce the influence of entrenched party elites and government ministers.
- o reducing the size of the party apparatus by eliminating the branch economic departments.
- o forming a national front-type organization, similar to those found in Eastern Europe, that would include other political groups besides the communist party.

II. Uncertain Powers

The extent of support for such proposals is unclear, and Gorbachev faces a significant challenge as he seeks to lay the groundwork for radical change at the Conference. Party rules do not explicitly define the powers of a Party Conference, and the leadership has yet to specify what the June meeting will do, suggesting they may be divided over the issue.

- o Gorbachev presumably wants the Conference to have broad powers so that he may attain authoritative backing for controversial political reforms. Some press articles have argued that a Party Conference has almost the same powers as a Party Congress, the most authoritative type of party meeting. Party Congresses are held once every five years.
- o One of the most critical questions concerns the Conference's ability to make changes in the Central Committee, a body of over 300 members that is elected at Party Congresses. At a minimum, the Conference will probably replace about 50 members who have either died or been removed from their official posts. There are some indications that Gorbachev would like to make

more substantial changes in the Central Committee's membership, but there has been no sign as yet that the Conference will have such powers.

III. Delegate Selection

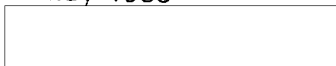
Gorbachev's most immediate challenge is to ensure that his supporters comprise a majority of the more than 5,000 delegates to the All-Union Party Conference. Early indications did not bode well for him, but there are some signs that he is pushing hard to gain control over the process.

- o A party decree stipulates that the delegates will be selected by plenary meetings of regional party organizations. Party conservatives are numerous in these organizations, and Gorbachev may have lost a battle to allow delegates to be chosen by rank-and-file party members.
- o The delegates were supposed to be chosen in April and May, but there is no sign that the process has begun. This delay may reflect political infighting over selection procedures. The Soviet press has carried some obviously pro-Gorbachev letters suggesting that the procedures be changed to ensure that party conservatives do not dominate the Conference.
- o In mid-April, Gorbachev met personally with regional party leaders to discuss Conference preparations. The meetings were probably designed to put pressure on party leaders to comply with Gorbachev's wishes.*

Many of these uncertainties may be eliminated if the Central Committee holds a plenum to discuss Conference preparations in May, as widely rumored. Gorbachev would want to use a plenum to build political momentum going into the Conference and, perhaps, to make some leadership changes that will facilitate the reform process.

- o A plenum could clarify the status of "Second Secretary" Ligachev, whose oversight of the party apparatus puts him in a strong position to influence Conference preparations. Rumors have been circulating in Moscow for weeks that Ligachev may have been stripped of some of his responsibilities for party affairs.
- o Georgiy Razumovskiy, a longtime Gorbachev associate, is rumored to be slated for promotion to the Politburo. Razumovskiy is a strong candidate to take over Ligachev's responsibilities for party matters, and he is much more likely to support Gorbachev's political reforms.

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